

timely, I believe thoughtful, and which the American people overwhelmingly supported.

So I would say to the defenders of the filibuster: Show us it can work. We have had so little legislative activity that was subject to this filibuster rule over the last several years, and, obviously, some Senators are very content with that. I am not. There is work to be done, not just in the areas I have mentioned but in so many others. Infrastructure programs for Americans are a good example too.

Let's get to work in the Senate and do what we were elected to do: to deliberate, to legislate, to amend, to express different points of view but, ultimately, to enact laws that will make this a better nation.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Madam President, I want to salute a member of my staff before I make this statement. His name is Chris Homan. He has been with me a number of years. He has a special passion for people who are languishing in prisons around the world for so-called political crimes, and he has convinced me to make this my cause as well.

Time after time, we have been successful at seeing the release of these political prisoners simply by speaking on the floor and addressing the Embassies of the countries where they are imprisoned and trying to put some political pressure on the leaders of those countries to release those prisoners. You wouldn't believe that would work, would you, in an authoritarian regime, but it turns out it does, and over the years, we have been successful in helping many political prisoners be released. Today, I would like to address that topic again.

There are political prisoners languishing in jails around the world for nothing more than advocating for human rights and political freedom. These brave souls are often led to believe their efforts to push for freedoms are forgotten. I come to the floor today to tell them that is not the case.

Let me start with a particularly cruel and troubling set of cases: a Saudi writer, Raif Badawi, and his lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair. Badawi was arrested in 2012 for his peaceful writings, charged with apostasy, sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2012 and 1,000 lashes, at least 50 of which were carried out despite international uproar. Badawi suffers poor health, hypertension. His condition has worsened during 10 years in prison.

I had the honor of meeting his wife, Ensaf Haidar, here in Washington, DC, some years ago. She is living in exile in Canada with her young children after facing threats to her life in Saudi Arabia.

Badawi's lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair, a leading human rights activist, also was arrested in 2014 and sentenced to 10 years in prison and a 15-year travel ban.

As these two men near the latter years of their sentences, I once again

appeal to the Government of the Saudis to free them. They have suffered enough.

I also call for the release of Filipina Senator Leila de Lima, who just spent her fourth year languishing in jail in the Philippines. This is a photo of her in her cell.

As a leading human rights advocate, she has criticized the actions of the President of her country, Rodrigo Duterte. From time to time, she writes from her cell. Let me share a short excerpt from this brave woman who, incredibly, after 4 years in confinement, still maintains her sense of humor. She wrote:

Warm greetings from my detention quarters at the Philippine National Police Custodial Center, Camp Crame! . . . I do not know how long I will remain behind bars but there is one thing that I am sure of—my will to fight for what is right continues to be undeterred.

She is not alone. Many of us have spoken about Duterte's political harassment of Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, who received her 9th arrest warrant in November and 10th in January.

I have met with many in the Filipino American community in Illinois. We have a great, great community of Filipinos in the Chicagoland area and across the State. I know that they and colleagues here, like Senators MARKEY and LEAHY, will continue to support efforts to see a more accountable and democratic Philippines.

Lastly, let me turn to the United Arab Emirates, where one of the Nation's top human rights defenders, Ahmed Mansoor, also just passed his fourth year in jail. You see, Mansoor was arrested under the guise that his social media post advocating for human rights threatened the social harmony of the UAE. He is considered to be one of the last human rights defenders in the Emirates, one who peacefully advocates for freedom of expression, fair trials, and the humane treatment of prisoners.

Since his troubling sentencing in 2017, he has endured solitary confinement and cruel separation from his family. Despite the dismal conditions of his incarceration, he remains steadfast in his commitment to human rights, even conducting multiple hunger strikes in protest of jail conditions—the same conditions he spoke against before his detention. It is long overdue that Emiratis let this man go.

America's strength around the world comes not only from its military and its economy but also from the power of its ideals. I can tell you from the many former prisoners who have come to visit me over the years that the support of this body and this Congress and the American people, which we may just take for granted as another speech on the floor of the Senate, can make a difference. They have come to learn that someone actually mentioned their name on the floor of the U.S. Senate in Washington, DC. It sustains them. It encourages them. It gives them hope,

and it puts pressure on the governments that jail them to justify and rationalize the cruel treatment that they are responsible for.

So let me remind Raif Badawi, Waleed Abulkhair, Senator Leila de Lima, Maria Ressa, and Ahmed Mansoor: You are not forgotten. We will continue to advocate for your freedom, and we hope that it comes someday soon.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF MARTIN JOSEPH WALSH

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, this pandemic has made it clearer than ever: It is not corporations that drive our economy; it is American workers.

With Marty Walsh, for whom we will vote in a moment on confirmation for the Department of Labor, workers will finally have someone on their side, as the Department that is supposed to look out for them. The Department of Labor is supposed to be the voice for workers in our government. It is their job to make sure workers' rights are protected, that people are safe on the job, that everyone can organize a union and get the overtime pay they have earned.

For 4 years, we have had a Department of Labor full of corporate lawyers. In fact, the Secretary of Labor was a corporate lawyer who made millions of dollars in court attacking labor unions and getting very well paid for it. That Department was full of people who made their careers fighting for corporate boards and CEOs, trying to squeeze every last penny out of workers and skirting labor laws.

And we saw the results. The DOL stopped fighting to raise the overtime pay threshold. In my State, tens of thousands of workers and, nationally, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of workers failed to get a raise as a result.

A year into the pandemic, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA, still has not issued an emergency temporary standard to protect workers from coronavirus. When 1,300 workers last year got sick at a Smithfield meatpacking plant, they fined the company a pathetic \$10 per worker.

With Marty Walsh, that corporate infiltration of the Department of Labor ends now. Mayor Walsh will put the focus back where it should be: fighting for the people who make this country work.

We know that for far too many Americans, hard work doesn't pay off. They have seen corporate profits go up. They have seen executive compensation skyrocket. They have become